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Teaching Economics in Schools

SUKANYA BOSE, ARVIND SARDANA

The curricular changes based on the National Curriculum Framework (2005) have enfolded Economics education at the school level. This article reviews in detail the imperative for and the main elements of the change, and argues that the issues involved merit the attention of professional economists.

Only by the use of our best minds in devising curricula will we bring the fruits of scholarship and wisdom to the student just beginning his studies.

—Jerome Bruner (1960)

The final batch of the new school level textbooks by National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) based on National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (2005) has been published. For some of us who have been associated with the writing of the new Economics textbooks (till the high school), it is time to reflect on what has been accomplished and how to carry this work forward.

The debate of Economics education in schools was wide open till a few decades back. It was widely contested whether Economics should be taught at the school level. Most people felt that Economics as “sanctified knowledge” did not merit a place in the curriculum, and the school curriculum ought to retain its focus on the development of basic abilities and skills. The time diverted to teaching Economics could be better utilised in acquiring skills like math and language and attaining a mastery over them, which would be useful in the long run. Others (mostly from within the discipline) felt that “there are substantial generalisations belonging to economics which are a vital part of any selection from the culture of a society” [Lawton cited in Taylor 1977], “Economics as a discipline adds important substantive content and gives important intellectual training (such as logical reasoning)”, and that “Economics education is important for fostering of economics judgments on contemporary issues as a vital part of the education of the individual as a citizen and member of society” [Dunning 1970]. These arguments in turn were frowned upon by the non-economists (and also by some economists) as creating demand for one’s own discipline.

While this intellectual debate was still on, Eklavya, an institution working in the

field of education developed social science textbooks for the Upper Primary Stage (UPS) in which Economics figured as a component of the Civics syllabus. This inclusion was based on the understanding that all students should have the opportunity of acquiring basic general principles necessary for elementary economic and social understanding. The mandate, however, was not to teach Economics as such but to draw on Economics to illumine aspects of social and economic life.¹

Experiences and learnings from Eklavya’s social science programme (1985) enriched over the years through intensive field trials, actual teaching and follow-up in schools, and teacher trainings have exerted a strong influence on the Social Science textbooks based on NCF (2005), to which we shall now turn.

The article is organised as follows. Section 1 discusses the content and approach of Economics at the UPS in the new textbooks. Section 2 puts in perspective the secondary level Economics course both across time and space. Section 3 looks at the salient departures in the new secondary level Economics texts in terms of content and pedagogy. Section 4 stresses the need for dynamism in the curricular process and identifies the important gaps in the present exercise with the hope that these might be addressed in future work. The article ends with a plea for greater involvement of the academic community in Economics education at the school level.

1 Economics at the Upper Primary Stage (Grade VIth-VIIIth)

The NCF 2005 debated the purpose of the Civics course, which according to the earlier Yashpal Committee report (1992-93) had been reduced to teaching meaningless rituals and still exhibited the colonial framework of converting people into “loyal citizens”. The new conceptualisation emerging from these deliberations attempts to break away from the tradition and impress “the dynamism of a process that produces structures of dominance and their contestations by social forces”. In keeping with this epistemic shift, Civics has been renamed as Social and Political

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Life at the UPS (and Political Science in higher grades).

Civics in the new avatar of Social and Political Life has within it many topics from Sociology, Gender, Media and Subaltern studies as also Economics. The economics component of "Social and Political Life" textbooks, though small, is significant.²

In the first year, students are introduced to a variety of livelihoods in the rural and urban areas. The diversity of contexts are then meaningfully used to draw distinction between farm and non-farm activities, farmers and labourers, self-employed and wage-employed, formal and informal workers and also discuss issues such as dearth of work, differing terms and conditions of work, etc.

The next two years of UPS are devoted to understanding the two major organising principles of our economy, markets and the government, in a contemporary setting. Beginning with the physical notion of market as a place of exchange (example of 'haat', 'mandi', local shops, mall), the unit on markets goes on to discuss how markets function both in terms of connecting distant producers and buyers on the one hand and also creating vastly different opportunities for them.

Students by the time they reach UPS have already formed an opinion on the functioning of the government and most often the opinion – at least among the urban middle class students – is that of an institution ridden with inefficiencies and corruption, which should be replaced by "the smarter" private sector. The discussion on government in grade VIII takes cognisance of government failure in some of the important roles that it is supposed to take on such as universal provision of public facilities and regulation of economic activities, while emphasising that these are roles it is bound to honour constitutionally if one were to achieve a decent quality of life for all.

In tune with the overall emphasis of these texts, a political economy approach was adopted for the economics sections. Admittedly, the analytical categories used are not always simple, but the use of a variety of cases before generalising and the near complete absence of formal jargon is supposed to make the topics interesting and comprehensible for the

students. The treatment is focused on real examples and real life situations, starting from the familiar ones to more complex situations. These are then juxtaposed against questions on social ethics such as "would you consider this a fair price?", "who are the people benefiting?", "did people get justice in this case?". Seen from another angle, rather than discuss the ideas of democracy, equality, secularism and social justice as mere constitutional ideals (the usual trend for civics syllabus in India), their meanings are explored through the life experiences of ordinary people in an every day setting.

2 Secondary-level Economics

In the US, the National Council on Economics Education's *A Framework for Teaching the Basic Concepts* provides a set of economic concepts for teaching Economics in schools below the college level. Over the years, this framework has been adopted in many other countries across the globe. Philip Saunders, one of the people associated with the development of this framework, lists the seven-most important economic concepts for early development of critical thinking and decision-making skills as opportunity cost, marginal analysis, interdependence, exchange, productivity, money, markets and prices [Saunders 1994]. Further, he writes that macroeconomic topics can be introduced after these basic topics have been covered. This framework places economic freedom and economic efficiency as the two most important social goals for an economy.

From its inception in 1977, the Economics textbook at the secondary level – brought out by the NCERT has taken an original approach, quite different from the utilitarian framework laid above.³ Echoing the main economic problems of the time, an account of the Indian economic development formed the subject matter of IXth and Xth grade Economics. The first Economics textbook introduced at this level, *Our Economy* was taught in schools for close to two decades.⁴ In the foreword to the 1992 edition of the book, the objective of teaching Economics is explicitly stated as "imparting knowledge and understanding of the structure of the Indian economy, and various problems and issues in

development". Tapas Majumdar, the author of the book notes in the preface, "the basic ability to identify and use knowledge about the economy is becoming far too important to be left to the care of professional economists alone".

Our Economy: An Introduction quite correctly sets the tone for high school economics in India and all the subsequent attempts at textbook writing have followed the overall framework proposed in this book. Taking a broad view of development that would mean not only growth but also social justice, the institutional and structural features of the economy were laid out with care and related to the constraints on development. The issue of employment (or the lack of it) received adequate emphasis and public policy intervention had an important place in the discussions, over and above the role played by the market.

With all its merits, however, this book would not qualify as a beginner's text judged even by the most conservative pedagogical standards. Learning for all age groups requires plenty of experience and thinking through concrete situations in order to come to grips with the facts and events of life upon which concepts and theories are based. The need for a concrete sense of economic life is even greater for younger age groups. *Our Economy: An Introduction* had far too many concepts introduced all at once with few examples and applications. The language was terse and technical. The implication was that teachers teaching the book, most of whom were not Economics teachers, would teach by bracketing the text and students would memorise for examinations. If the author's emphasis was on conceptual understanding, it achieved exactly the opposite result.⁵

That this book (with some reorganisation) should have a run of 20 years or more speaks of the general neglect of curricular issues and apathy towards school Economics.

3 Continuity and Change

The pedagogical shifts as required by the NCF (2005) – the leading document for the new set of NCERT textbooks – were therefore long awaited and most welcome. It required that the nature of textbooks change fundamentally towards

development of critical thinking in students and away from rote learning; use children's experiences and local contexts in teaching; use enquiry-based learning methods involving debates, discussions, a variety of applications and activities and explore newer forms of evaluation that privilege critical thinking rather than recall. The process of textbook writing was also made more democratic by having teams rather than an individual to draw up the curriculum, write and review the textbooks. Teachers and grass root NGOs with field experience were made a part of the curricular process right from the beginning, so that texts could be more relevant and communicative.

Adhering to the NCF (2005) meant a thorough reorganisation of the Economics course at the high school level as well as cutting a large part of its weight. In the following discussion, we illustrate how the epistemic and pedagogic concerns of the NCF are addressed in the new Economics textbooks for the high school.⁶

General Education

The high school course is a part of general education. Every student has to study all the subjects offered, so that the disciplines need to cater to general students and might be compared with liberal arts education. It is only at the higher secondary stage where streaming takes place and the students have exercised their individual preferences of subjects that the disciplines might be seen as specialised fields. While this might seem reasonable, in reality, one often finds that what is meant for specialised education is mixed up within general education. In the sciences, for instance, the higher secondary course forces expectations downward so that the secondary-level course is designed thinking about the higher secondary. This is pedagogically illogical. There could certainly be a link between general education and specialised education, but without forcing down subject content.

If we see the high school Economics course, the conceptual areas and the economic issues covered are broadened (compared to the UPS) and some of the formal economics usages are introduced so that the learner can relate this knowledge to what they hear in the media/adult

conversations. But abstractions are still few, there is no formal theory and all themes retain practical relevance. It is geared towards general education.

Thematic Approach

One reason why the earlier NCERT textbook, *Our Economy: An Introduction* had a much higher level of difficulty than was appropriate for learners at that stage lies in the book trying to provide students with a core knowledge of Economics (though this objective remains largely unstated).

In a significant departure, the curriculum for high school Economics has dropped this agenda. Instead the aim is to introduce students to the ways of thinking adopted in Economics. This change in focus has meant that the textbooks need not be comprehensive in terms of covering all the conceptual areas (such as in a Principles course) but can be illustrative to a certain extent. In what educationists call thematic approach, the curriculum is organised around themes that connect conceptual categories to authentic learning contexts. The advantages of thematic approach are twofold. First, the learner starts from a real context/situation, which may reflect many of his own experiences and therefore provides a convenient (and far more interesting) entry point into a topic. Second, the conceptual areas can be determined by what aspects of economic reality one is considering, rather than the conceptual areas leading the horse, as has been the case most often. This approach has led to smaller conceptual load and greater use of real contexts and situations in the new Economics textbooks.

Macro Perspective

Development is the central theme of the two books. Besides a range of core issues such as indicators of development, money and credit, employment and poverty, contemporary issues like environmental sustainability, right to work, globalisation have been included.

The emphasis is on a macro view.⁷ Starting with a variety of examples/case studies that introduce economic ideas at an individual/smaller level, the generalisations supported by secondary data gradually lead the learner towards a macro view. Though students (and teachers) have some

initial hesitation and difficulty in engaging with the generalised picture, they do ultimately work through the numbers and graphs and the economic logic.⁸ A balance between specific illustrations and the generalised picture therefore is what is necessary and would enable the students to relate everyday economic activity to the workings of the economy. How to do that is a challenge. Without the macro view, an understanding of the Indian economy would be incomplete, but one needs to keep in mind that a macro perspective does not come easily. For instance, many students and teachers have personal experiences of labour shortages. They have difficulty coming to terms with the characterisation of the Indian economy as labour surplus and unemployment as "the" major problem facing the economy. To take another example, while students easily understand the function of banks as financial intermediaries, they fail to appreciate that demand deposits are a form of money. There are many such examples where the macro perspective might be at variance with intuitive knowledge. The recent inflationary spate and the understanding of the nature of the problem is another obvious example of this gap. This is where the contribution of a subject expert becomes important to the exploration of an experience. It must lead the learner from the immediate and narrowly personal reactions into a more general understanding.

Emphasis on Structure

For long, educationists have held that it is important to give students an understanding of the fundamental structure of whatever we teach. "The teaching and learning of structure rather than simply the mastery of facts and techniques is at the centre of the classic problem of transfer. This is the main requirement of using knowledge, for bringing it to bear on problems and events that one encounters outside a classroom or in classrooms one enters later in one's training."⁹

To cite an example from Economics, an understanding of terms of credit and how it varies across classes of borrowers depending on their socio-economic status will mean learning a structure. It can be extended to many other situations such as analysing the problem of farmer's suicide

and rural indebtedness to a study of inter-linked markets and agrarian relations in later training. It may so happen that the rule, which underlies the structure, remains unknown to the learners even while they are using it. For instance, in learning of a language even while young children are able to use the structural rules of English, they are unable to say what these rules are. But unconsciously, they have grasped the structure.

Often textbooks to the detriment of the learner have failed to emphasise the logical structure inside the conceptual framework but have focused more on introducing new categories and new information. This has been particularly the bane of Indian Economics course (at various levels), and one needs to escape this trap. Tendulkar (1988) sets out an excellent set of guidelines for the study of Indian economy. These guidelines effectively combine analytical description, framework and conceptualisation with empirical evidence and thereby provide a general method of approaching the Indian economic problems. Though these guidelines pertain to a different academic level, some of the general principles can be extended gainfully to school level Economics. Admittedly, this is a challenging task and serious efforts are needed to creatively organise text material so as to impart a perspective for understanding the Indian economy.

Student-Friendly Learning

Along with making the discipline relevant it is also necessary to present it in an interesting manner for students. A number of steps (common to this genre of textbooks) have addressed this issue. Firstly, conscious efforts have been made to keep the language simple (and non-technical) so that the average student can read and follow the text on his/her own. Secondly, to read and interpret data is an essential skill and students at this stage enjoy drawing tables, making charts and graphs. A number of different exercises in the textbooks have been devoted to hone this ability and show that arguments need to be supported by facts/evidence. Thirdly, a variety of questions to test and reinforce concepts, develop comprehension, debate and discuss policy issues, apply concepts to a new situations have been provided. Fourthly,

unlike textbooks of the past, which were dominated by texts, attempt has been made to use visuals themselves as texts.

Normative Concerns

NCF (2005) puts heavy emphasis on the normative concerns of social science curriculum:

The major thrust of social science curriculum has remained utilitarian in nature. It puts more emphasis on developmental issues that are important but not sufficient to understand the normative dimension – issues of equality, justice and dignity... There is need to achieve a shift in focus from utilitarianism to egalitarianism...

While this observation relates in general to social science, it could just as well have been a criticism directed at Economics in particular. Concerns have been voiced on the nature of Economics discourse both from outside and within the discipline for quite some time now. The mainstream discourse has been blamed for its failure to illuminate most of economic reality; preoccupation with formalism; commitment to view the world only through narrow neoclassical lens; and absence of ethical and philosophical considerations. The issue assumes an even more serious dimension seen against the widening inequality in the society (mostly regarded as natural) and the increasing distances between the rich and the poor, both physically and emotionally (see Box 1).

In discussing development and its facets we have been aware of this challenge. Income distribution, distribution of land and agrarian relations, distribution of credit and credit relations, distributive implications of globalisation, etc, are some of

the topics that address issues of equality/inequality directly. Besides these contexts, life situations and voices of the economically and socially marginalised groups are brought out in examples, illustrations, and cartoons. Some exercises and activities in the books involve interacting with workers, employers, debtors, producers, consumers, etc, through non-classroom activities/visits. The objective of such non-classroom activities is to give the students a concrete sense of economic life, which might be otherwise missing from their experiences.

While attempts along this direction have been made, we will admit that probably more could have been done and we need to debate seriously whether social ethics needs a more central role in Economics education.

Heterodoxy and Pluralism

Taking the cue from *Our Economy: An Introduction*, the approach adopted in the new high school textbooks is heterodox.¹⁰ Some of the features that distinguish the approach in these textbooks from the mainstream approach are the following:

- institutional and social structures are central to the analysis;
- markets are important but only as one of the several institutions in the economy;
- questions of distribution are emphasised;
- development is interpreted as much more than material gain;
- social, historical and political phenomena are important to understanding economic outcomes; and
- among the contemporary problems of the Indian economy, employment is seen as the major one.

Box 1: Should We Expand the Scope of Social Ethics in Economics?

- * A teacher at KV school in Delhi while discussing the chapter on Development, strongly contended a point made in the textbook that different life situations contribute to differences in economic position across people in the society. According to her, Africa was underdeveloped because people did not work hard enough and did not have the will to develop. So was the case with most of our poor people. To illustrate her point, she ingeniously referred to Praveen Mahajan and Pramod Mahajan and how the two brothers had the same opportunities but made different use of these opportunities.
- * An exercise on "how to develop the local area" conducted with a group of working class children received the maximum number of votes for "construction of flyover" and then "shopping mall" from the large menu of choices that the children came up with.
- * In a group discussion at a premier Delhi school, the students asked why there was so much discussion about villages and villagers in the textbook. Obviously they felt this was not important.
- * A senior Economics teacher shared how she felt embarrassed talking about differences in landholding pattern across social classes. According to her such passages should not be a part of the text.
- * A teacher at the MCD school in discussing health as an indicator of development, explained that it is the poverty of the people that makes our public health system function so poorly! In developed countries, everyone uses private healthcare. Such views about poor people crowding the cities, hospitals, railway stations and other public spaces are very strong in the minds of both students and teachers.

(Based on fieldwork done in Delhi schools in 2007.)

While the problems of the Indian economy lend themselves quite naturally to a heterodox approach, we were much less sure how to address pluralism in the textbooks. Pluralist approach would hold that "there is more than one way to think about the economy, and that a fair and public hearing of those alternative ways is crucial to the health of the economic conversation".¹¹ In Economics the debate around pluralism has become particularly strong after the French students' petition made a strong appeal against "a single dominant view" and for a plurality of perspectives in teaching of Economics. NCF (2005) also talks about the need for multiple perspectives. Effectively, it would translate into a crossfire of sorts with neoliberals arguing for liberalisation and the Marxists (or any other heterodox school) taking an opposite view and giving these two contending viewpoints equal weight in the textbook. The students could then form their own opinion depending on which argument they find more convincing. Why not let the question remain open here?

While pluralism has its own merit, there are two problems in adopting this approach at the high school level. First, there is a practical problem. To introduce various perspectives would require some familiarity with the various paradigms from which these perspectives emerge, with their different assumptions, working model, historical context, etc, which is clearly beyond the scope of such introductory textbooks.¹²

Second, every perspective has an underlying ideology. The reason one chooses a particular approach/perspective over another is not just because it represents the truth better, but also because the approach best engages with the normative concerns that the writer would wish to uphold. In this particular case, heterodox approach with its emphasis on institutions and social structures was the one that we felt could speak of the challenges of the Indian economy in terms of democratic principles of equality, dignity, social well-being, social justice, etc. NCF (2005) has stressed these democratic principles as the core of social science. If we accept this mandate, it is difficult to escape the paradigmatic influence and give equal weight to all the perspectives that obviously have very different ideologies.

Short of pluralism, what has been attempted in these books is to illustrate that different people depending upon their position in the society derived from class, caste, gender, rural/urban identities have different (and many a times contending) perspectives on the same issue.

4 Looking Ahead

Writing a textbook is best viewed as a dynamic process rather than as an end product in itself which means that even an elementary level textbook must maintain contact with the frontiers of research both in terms of content and pedagogy. New ideas and ways of thinking should stand a chance of finding a place in the textbooks and there has to be a continuous engagement with these issues. Capacities cannot be built overnight.

There is another sense in which textbook writing should be a dynamic process. While much of the analysis of curriculum development contained in this article talks about the curriculum as a set of objectives, a body of content and a range of methods, the curriculum is also something that has to take root and develop in actual school settings. It is realised in the day to day life of a school, which embodies organisation, social relationships, the ethos of the school, etc. Thus, a genuine process of follow-up and feedback from schools is necessary to see what is the impact of a textbook, how the teachers and students are engaging with it, to what extent it serves the objectives it is meant to fulfil, etc.

At a more complex level, one might need to view curricular change as a process of social negotiation where various groups in society exert a strong pressure whether they are the aspirations of the urban middle class, outdated views of a discipline or cultural notions of how children learn. To deal and respond to these pressures might be inevitable.

In the following points, we identify some specific areas that can be seen as gaps in the present exercise and might be considered important to future work.

(1) While we have discussed the approach and method of Economics as well as issues of pedagogy in some detail, the curricular choice – selection of specific themes – has been deliberately kept brief. In fact, this is one of the areas where more

work is necessary. The Economics syllabus at the high school revolving around the overall theme of Indian economic development could have been more relevant and consistent, and the textbook writing team on various points had serious issues with the present syllabus, which was framed by another committee constituted by the NCERT.¹³ For instance, there were doubts over introducing topics such as globalisation in an introductory course, whereas certain important conceptual areas like state, markets, industrialisation, public finances did not figure in the syllabus.

The process of selecting themes should ideally involve a fair amount of research and consultation and definitely more rigour and time. The consultation has to be at both ends. At one end, there should be consultations with subject experts after a thorough literature survey. And at the other end, teachers and students need to be consulted and potential material should undergo trials of some kind. A review of the new books should suggest new ways of looking at the syllabus.

(2) Any curriculum has a vertical and a horizontal component. The vertical component reflects how the curriculum in a particular discipline develops through the various stages/levels.

Horizontally, the various disciplines within Social Science, even as they trace their own subject specific trajectories, have to provide the student with a view of Social Science as a whole. In other words, it is important that there be certain unifying principles and concerns of Social Science and each discipline within Social Science uses its specific medium to illustrate and complement these principles. At present, with four different textbooks and little dialogue across the four subject areas within Social Science, the subject appears fragmentary. While History has adopted a strong interdisciplinary approach, Geography is far removed with most of the course devoted to physical Geography. This is not meant as a criticism but only to stress that there is need for dialogue within the Social Science disciplines. Such dialogues and sharing of ideas, if it were to take place, would no doubt strengthen the disciplinary outcomes as well.

(3) Curricular reform demands an integration of three areas – new texts, teacher

training and an exam system. There has been little by way of teacher training and this is major lacuna (see Box 2). Examination system has seen minimal changes. The old examination system continues to influence heavily the mode and pattern of teaching. Without substantial reforms on these dimensions, there are risks that the progressive elements in the new texts be subverted.

(4) In the entire school system, Social Science has a low status in general and ranks much below science in the priority of subjects. This is observed in the low priority accorded by the school management to Social Science (for instance, the very few periods in the timetable, unwillingness to spend resources), students and parents' preconceived disrespect for the subject, etc. All this makes the teachers' task really hard and discourages ingenuity.

Even where the teacher might take an initiative, the rigidity in the system comes in the way. Teachers might wish not to cover the entire textbook but do selected portions from the book and spend time on activities that involve thinking and self-discovery. Teachers might wish to skip a "unit test" and instead take students out for a visit or call a person to talk and interact with students. Teachers might wish that the students answer questions in their own way rather than reproduce the text. The administrative structures both in government and private managed schools need to be much less rigid and allow teachers the freedom to enjoy the subject that they teach and not approach every aspect of the course like an exam drill.

(5) Any intervention at an all India level can only serve as a model and a lot of work is necessary for placing these texts within

regional or state level framework. This would ensure that appropriate examples from a familiar region are drawn up and linked to the macro perspective. Issues of regional concern could be taken up in some depth. Over time one should have diverse teaching-learning material available and thereby also reduce the dependence on a single text for any classroom situation.

(6) Finally, in view of the controversy regarding grade XII Microeconomics and Macroeconomics textbooks by NCERT, a few words on the state of higher secondary Economics will not be out of order here. Economics teachers teaching grade XII have objected to the new more mathematised versions of micro and macro and have forced the CBSE to allow books other than those published by the NCERT to be officially taught in schools (within the prescribed syllabus). This amounts to de facto scrapping of the new textbooks, though de jure they remain in place. The academic community, in turn, has strongly reacted to the criticism [Rakshit 2007] or simply ignored it. Whatever be the merit of the teachers' arguments, they need to be heard; curricular processes cannot ignore what teachers have to say.

In this context, there is a more general point that one would like to make. Higher-secondary course cannot be a watered down version of the undergraduate course as it currently is, with four different papers (Statistics, Indian Economy, Micro and Macro) and little by way of linkages across them. It has to be thought afresh. What is the motivation for studying Economics? This might be a question relevant at any stage but more so for the beginner or young student. How do you organise themes that provide such a motivation? Students are aware of larger issues such as poverty, wages, employment, etc.

What would help them look at the complexity in real life, at the not so obvious factors, some major policy issues that they see and hear around. For students to be motivated you have to discuss the "fruits" being offered by the discipline. It is a subject where students look for "practical relevance with rigour" [Chakravarty 1993]. As Sen points out both the "engineering" and the "ethical" aspects are of interest, therefore why not have themes that cover a range of issues.

While organising an undergraduate course, three-year period is assumed. At the higher secondary level, this is one subject among others and therefore should we not focus more on motivating students rather than offering a watered down version of a first-year undergraduate course?

5 In Lieu of Conclusion

School level Economics needs more inputs and attention of the Economics fraternity. Unfortunately, in the field of Economics, most in the academic community have remained dispassionate and indifferent to school level Economics and even reflections on college and university teaching in India are few. The contrast with some of the other disciplines that have received active support and participation of the academia and made the best use of this opportunity is striking. It is alarming that NCERT had difficulty even inviting eminent economists to the discussion tables. With so much of intellectual capital around, one was hard pressed for people at each stage: to write, review, comment.

One of the objectives of sharing our experience and insights is to get across to the readers that this exercise is both challenging and meaningful. There is substantial contribution to be made to advance the debates, provide clarity on the perspectives, review the curriculum and the textbooks, and build on the work that has but started. It is for us to seize the opportunity and participate in this important process of educational change.

Box 2: Teachers Need To Be Empowered to Teach...

Training for the teachers is a must. Teachers should have a chance to understand and have a dialogue on the objectives listed above. During our fieldwork in schools, we observed that there is a lack of understanding as to how to use the books. What to teach in a given chapter, which is organised in a very different manner and might reflect an entirely new perspective? How to use the large number of examples? How to frame questions? At places, where the students can follow the text on their own, teachers are at a loss as to what should be their role in the classroom.

In the absence of proper guidance, teachers most often have "covertly" turned to the private "guide books" that have reorganised the material along old lines (sans visuals sans examples, bulleted texts with readymade answers). This is most unfortunate.¹⁴ Just as teachers' experiences were tapped in the curricular process, teachers need to internalise the paradigm shift to effectively transact these books. Eklavya's experiences prove that teachers empowered through proper training and armed with sufficient flexibility in operation (a point discussed below) can be wonderfully creative and innovative in their teaching.¹⁵ The trainings, of course, have to be creatively organised with up-to-date teaching methods and clear instructions for teaching Economics.

NOTES

- 1 See 'Insider's Narrative' in Report on Teaching Social Sciences: A Review, Eklavya (2001).
- 2 See Social and Political Life, Part I, Grade VIth, NCERT, 2006. Social and Political Life, Part II, Grade VIIth, NCERT, 2007. Social and Political

Life, Part III, Grade VIIIth, NCERT, 2008. The full-texts are available on NCERT web site.

- 3 The same cannot be said about the Higher Secondary syllabus of the CBSE or the ICSE syllabus that has been framed on more traditional lines.
- 4 At the secondary level, Economics exists as a separate subject within Social Science. See *Our Economy, A Textbook on Economics for Grades IXth and Xth*, 1st Edition, June 1977, Published by Eurasia Publishing House with permission from NCERT.
- 5 For a detailed review of the book see Bose (2001).
- 6 See Economics, Grade IXth, NCERT, 2006 and Understanding Economic Development, Grade Xth, NCERT, 2007. Tapas Majumdar is the chief adviser of the Textbook Writing Committee. It is to his credit that he was most open to new ideas and rethinking of the texts.
- 7 Several of the basic concepts traditionally introduced in introductory courses have been extended to macro-contexts: the idea of scarcity (and abundance) is explored in the context of constraints of land and capital and the relative surplus of labour in a rural setting; interdependence is traced across the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors rather than across individuals; the notion of choice arises in public policy contexts; and the discussion on markets as part of globalisation ultimately develops into a discussion of market forces.
- 8 Observation based on feedback from teachers and students.
- 9 See 'The Importance of Structure', Chapter 2 in Bruner (1960).
- 10 There were some major tussles among the textbook committee members on the approach to the subject with some members holding that it is more appropriate to teach mainstream economics, which is also the majority view of the subject. Since neither group could convince the other, dissents could only be overcome by making the committee more homogeneous. Comparatively, there was a greater consensus on pedagogical issues.
- 11 See *The Economic Conversation* by Arjo Klamer, Deirdre McCloskey and Stephen Ziliak to be published as a Principles textbook in 2008.
- 12 We do have examples of different texts teaching a first course in economics that debate the contours of the discipline. While high school economics is not the site for this debate, plurality of approach is a relevant issue at the undergraduate level. This strongly influences the view of the discipline that future teachers imbibe.
- 13 The textbook writing team had little space to interrogate the syllabus. In general, flexibility in the process of writing the textbooks would have produced better results. The process of drawing up the curriculum was artificially separated from the task of writing the books. The new initiative of involving different people to participate in the curricular process was a welcome step. However, to achieve the best results required plenty of discussions and exchange of ideas so as to agree on a common perspective on the main issues relating to the textbooks. Often there was not enough time or an appreciation of these aspects, so that in some cases the texts appear to be going in different directions with no cohesion across chapters. Wherever the outcomes have been better, it's been a result of long hours of dedicated work by individuals or teams outside the official structure.
- 14 The proliferating private guides industry is a phenomenon that needs to be looked at seriously for the type of books, the content and pedagogy, pricing, copyright issues, etc.
- 15 See 'Dynamics of Knowledge and Praxis: A View from the Field', Chapter 5 in Batra (2008).

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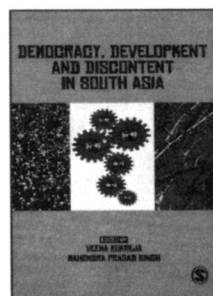
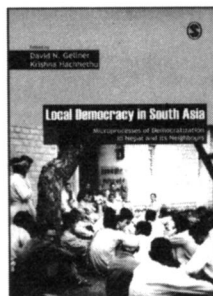
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